

Message Text

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53

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH IMMEDIATE

INFO AMEMBASSY SAIGON PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

COMUSSAG

UNCLAS STATE 241161

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: MOPS, MILI, CB

SUBJECT: AFTERMATH OF NEAK LUONG INCIDENT

1. FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF ARTICLE WHICH APPEARED IN DECEMBER 10, 1973 WASHINGTON POST. BEGIN QTE: "WE DESIRE TO COMPENSATE, INsofar AS POSSIBLE, THE SURVIVORS OF THE TRAGEDY ... " FORMER U.S. AMBASSADOR TO CAMBODIA, EMORY C. SWANK, AUGUST 22, 1973.

NEAK LUONG, CAMBODIA - FOUR MONTHS AFTER AN AMERICAN B-52 BOMBER MISTAKENLY DEVASTATED THIS TOWN, KILLING AND WOUNDING 400 PEOPLE, THE UNITED STATES STILL HAS NOT PAID FOR THE DESTROYED HOUSES AND OTHER PROPERTY.

NOR DOES IT INTEND TO, ALTHOUGH NO ONE HAS COMMUNICATED UNCLASSIFIED

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THAT TO THE PEOPLE HERE WHO ARE STILL WAITING HOPEFULLY.

"ALL THE VILLAGERS CAME TO ASK ME WHEN THE AMERICANS WOULD PAY FOR THE PROPERTY." SAID DISTRICT CHIEF THUY BUN THOEUN.

"EVENTUALLY IT GOT TO THE U.S. EMBASSY (IN PHNOM PENH) AND AN AMERICAN THERE SAID, "I WILL TRY TO ASK MY GOVERNMENT ABOUT THE DAMAGED PROPERTY."

THAT WAS SIX WEEKS AGO. THERE HAVE BEEN NO ANSWERS. WE DON'T KNOW IF THE AMERICANS WILL PAY OR NOT.

A U.S. EMBASSY SPOKESMAN IN PHNOM PENH SAID TODAY THAT THE

WOUNDED AND THE FAMILIES OF THE KILLED RECEIVED PAYMENTS FROM THE UNITED STATES BUT "THE PROGRAM CLOSED ON NOV. 30 AND THERE WILL NOT BE MORE PAYMENTS."

ASKED SPECIFICALLY IF THERE WOULD BE PAYMENTS FOR THE MORE THAN 100 DESTROYED HOUSES AND OTHER BUILDINGS, THE SPOKESMAN SAID: "THE PROGRAM IS CLOSED."

SO THE PEOPLE OF NEAK LUONG ARE LEFT WITH THEIR HOPES, THEIR DEAD AND WOUNDED, AND THE MEMORIES OF AN AMERICAN COLONEL IN DARK GLASSES WHO CAME AROUND AND PAID WHAT THEY CONSIDER A GROSSLY INSUFFICIENT SUM IN COMPENSATION FOR THE CASUALTIES.

IN AN AGREEMENT SIGNED AUG. 22 BY THE CAMBODIAN AND AMERICAN GOVERNMENTS, THE UNITED STATES AGREED TO REBUILD A DESTROYED HOSPITAL AND TO PAY THE SURVIVORS OF EACH OF THE 140 DEAD THE EQUIVALENT OF ABOUT \$400, ACCORDING TO NEWS REPORTS AT THE TIME.

THE HOSPITAL HAS INDEED BEEN REBUILT AND IS EXPECTED TO BE OPENED SOMETIME THIS MONTH, ACCORDING TO OFFICIALS HERE SUPERVISING THE WORK.

BUT THE TOWNSPEOPLE HERE COMPLAINED THAT THEY RECEIVED MUCH LESS THAN THE PROMISED \$400 SURVIVOR PAYMENT. THEY SAID THE AMERICANS PAID THE EQUIVALENT OF \$166 FOR A DEATH OR A GRAVE WOUND AND \$116 OR LESS FOR A LESS UNCLASSIFIED

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SERIOUS WOUND.

IN MANY CASES, THE TOWNSPEOPLE SAID, THEY EVEN HAD TO TAKE THIS MONEY AND PAY THEIR OWN HOSPITAL BILLS, LEAVING THEM WITH HARDLY ANY MONEY AND WITH THEIR HOUSES AND OTHER PROPERTY DESTROYED.

NEAK LUONG, LOCATED AMONG FERTILE RICE FLATLANDS ON THE EAST BANK OF THE MEKONG RIVER 40 MILES SOUTHEAST OF PHNOM PENH, SEEMED LIKE A GHOST TOWN.

THE PEOPLE WERE LIVING IN SHACKS IN THE NORTHERN PART OF TOWN, SOME OF WHICH HAVE BEEN HASTILY RECONSTRUCTED. THE

MARKET PLACE, A WIDE AREA SURROUNDED BY TWO-STORY STONE BUILDINGS, HAD ONLY A FEW WOODEN SHACKS IN ITS CENTER AND THE SURROUNDING BUILDINGS WERE SMASHED AND GUTTED.

MOST OF THE DAMAGE WAS DONE BY THE MISTAKEN B-52 STRIKE BEFORE DAWN ON THE MORNING OF AUGUST 6, 1973, WHEN A SINGLE AIRPLANE FLYING NORTH OVER THIS TOWN FAILED TO OPERATE HIS ELECTRONIC GEAR PROPERLY. THE BOMBS CUT A MILE-LONG SWATH THROUGH THE CENTER OF TOWN. "EVERYBODY HERE LOST A LOT OF PROPERTY," SAID KANG SARAN, A TAX COLLECTOR. "THE AMERICANS HAVEN'T PAID FOR THE PROPERTY YET, AND I THINK THEY SHOULD."

THE PEOPLE SEEMED TO BE HUDDLED IN THE MARKETPLACE. SOMEHOW TOO SMALL A GROUP FOR SUCH A LARGE, DEVASTATED SPACE. THE NORMAL BUSTLE AND VERVE OF A MARKETPLACE WAS NOT THERE.

"COULD THIS SORT OF MISTAKE HAPPEN AGAIN?" ASKED NEANG THAVUTH, A CAMBODIAN SAILOR WITH A WORRIED EXPRESSION ON HIS FACE.

HE APPEARED RELIEVED WHEN TOLD THAT THE AMERICANS ARE NO LONGER BOMBING IN CAMBODIA AT ALL.

TO THE SOUTH OF THE MARKETPLACE, IN THE CAMBODIAN NAVY COMPOUND THAT WAS COMPLETELY OBLITERATED BY THE MISTEKEN UNCLASSIFIED

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BOMBING, A SLIM 30-YEAR OLD CAMBODIAN MOTHER, UM NUON, WEPT REPEATEDLY DURING A LONG INTERVIEW.

UM NUON WEPT FOR HER DEAD 3-YEAR OLD SON, TIM SA RATH. "MY GOD, HE WAS SO BEAUTIFUL," SHE SAID. "I REMEMBER HOW HE WOULD TODDLE OUT TO MEET ME WHEN I CAME BACK FROM THE MARKET."

SHE WEPT AND WEPT. SHE TALKED ABOUT HIM REPEATEDLY, TELLING HOW SHE STILL HAS NIGHTMARKES OF HOW, ON THAT MORNING OF THE BOMBING, "I SAW THE BACK OF HIS HEAD BLOWN OFF."

HER TWO OTHER CHILDREN WERE ALSO WOUNDED BY THE BOMBING, AS WERE SHE AND HER HUSBAND.

HER HUSBAND, TIM CHAN, 29, SAID HE RECEIVED A TOTAL COMPENSATION FROM THE AMERICAN COLONEL IN DARK GLASSES OF \$438, DIVIDED AS FOLLOWS:

- (1) \$116 FOR THE DEAD CHILD
- (2) \$116 FOR HIS OWN STOMACH WOUND, FROM WHICH PUS WAS

STILL DRAINING AS HE TALKED.

(3) \$20 FOR HIS WIFE'S BROKEN WRIST, WHICH SHE SAID STILL PAINS HER SO MUCH SHE CAN NOT WORK TO SUPPLEMENT THEIR MEAGER \$20-A-MONTH NAVY INCOME.

(4) \$20 FOR A HEAD WOUND TO HIS 7-YEAR-OLD SON, TIM CLYNA, WHO STILL HAS A PIECE OF SHRAPNEL LODGED IN HIS SKULL.

(5) \$116 FOR A CHEST WOUND TO HIS 6-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER, TIM CHANNA, WHO IS NOW COMPLETELY RECOVERED.

THE FAMILY RECEIVED NO MONEY FOR THEIR DESTROYED HOUSE.

AN AMERICAN WOULD HAVE CALLED IT A SHACK, BUT IN FACT TIM CHAN SAID IT WAS FAR MORE ADEQUATE THAN THE SHACK THEY ARE LIVING IN TODAY, WHICH IS MADE OF AMMUNITION CRATES.

"LIVING HERE IS SO AWFUL," SAID HIS WIFE SNIFFLYING AND WRINGING HER HANDS.

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POINTING AT THE DIRT FLOOR (THEIR DESTROYED HOUSE HAD A RAISED WOODEN FLOOR), SHE SAID LAST NIGHT IT RAINED HEAVILY AND THE WATER CAME IN UP TO THE BED LEVEL.

UM NUON REMEMBERED "OUR OLD HOUSE, OVER THERE, NEAR THE MANGO TREE."

UNLIKE THE AMERICAN MILITARY, THE CAMBODIAN NAVY DOES NOT PROVIDE HOUSING HERE FOR THE SAILORS, SO TIM CHAN HAD TO BUILD BOTH THE OLD AND NEW HOUSES HIMSELF AND AT HIS OWN EXPENSE.

THE TIN SIDING FOR THE OLD HOUSE WAS EXPENSIVE AND HE HAD NOT BEEN ABLE TO AFFORD SUCH A LUXURY IN THE NEW HOUSE. HE SAID THIS WAS HARD FOR HIM, BECAUSE HIS WIFE SAID: "BEFORE HE WAS WOUNDED HE WAS A STRONG MAN, AND NOW HE IS A WEAK MAN."

"WE RECEIVED \$438 IN ALL," SHE SAID "BUT THEN WE HAD TO TURN RIGHT AROUND AND PAY \$200 FOR HIS OPERATION." "I LOST EVERYTHING IN THE HOUSE AND THE AMERICANS DIDN'T PAY FOR ANYTHING."

HER HUSBAND, WHO WORE SPECTACLES, SAID THE FAMILY'S TOTAL CAPITAL ASIDE FROM THE NAVY INCOME IS \$33. HE IS SAVING THAT MONEY TO DO SOME BUSINESS ON THE SIDE WHEN HIS WIFE HAS RECOVERED.

TIM CHAN AND UM NUON MET IN TAKHMAU, JUST A FEW MILES SOUTH OF PHNOM PENH, 11 YEARS AGO.

BOTH WERE FROM POOR FAMILIES, AND BOTH HAD COME SOUTH
TO THE COUNTRY'S CAPITAL TO MAKE THEIR

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